

AURELIUS P. ALBERGA

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

AFRO-AMERICANS IN SAN FRANCISCO
PRIOR TO WORLD WAR II

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A. P. Alberga
(Interviewee)

Date 2-2-78

James de T. Abajian
(Interviewer)

Date 2-4-1978

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Co-Sponsored by:

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Project Coordinator: Lynn Bonfield

INTERVIEW WITH A.P. ALBERGA

DECEMBER 7, 1976

At the home of Mr. Alberga, Oakland, California

Interviewer: Albert S. Broussard

Transcriber: Albert S. Broussard

BEGIN TAPE I

Bro: Mr. Alberga, when were you born?

Alb: October 22, 1884.

Bro: Where were you born?

Alb: San Francisco.

Bro: How about your parents, where were your parents born?

Alb: My father was born in Kingston, Jamaica. My mother was born in San Francisco.

Bro: Do you know what year your father and mother were born?

Alb: Oh, I really don't.

Bro: Why did your parents come to San Francisco?

Alb: Well, my mother was already here. My father was a seafaring man. His ship brought him to San Francisco and he became attached to it.

Bro: Do you know what type of work he did on the ship?

Alb: He was a first mate.

Bro: How long did he do this, most of his life?

Alb: Well, I think he did it for about seven or eight years.

Bro: How about your mother? What type of work did your mother do?

Alb: She didn't.

Bro: She never worked?

Alb: No.

Bro: Throughout her whole life?

Alb: No.

Bro: Tell me a little bit about San Francisco when you were a boy. What was the city like at that time? You were born in the nineteenth century so you go way, way back. What was San Francisco like then?

Alb: Well, in what respect do you mean?

Bro: Just in general, what did the city look like in comparison to when you grew older? Just the physical location.

Alb: Well, I don't know just how I would describe it. It was a big downtown that took in about eight square blocks and spread out in sparsely built-up sections.

Bro: Was it a big city, was it an exciting place to live? Were there a lot of things happening?

Alb: Yes, it was exciting. There was a great deal of outdoor life which the great majority of people looked forward to, until about midnight, and at about midnight we went to break up.

Bro: What kind of outdoor thing in particular did you enjoy doing?

Alb: Playing baseball, that was the chief thing then. We took up athletics, boxing and wrestling.

Bro: Did you have a lot of Negroes as friends as a young man?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: Did you have a lot of white boys as friends as well?

Alb: Yes, quite a few.

Bro: Do you consider your childhood days happy experiences when you look back on them?

Alb: Yes, very much so.

Bro: Do you think about them often even today as you've grown older?

Alb: Yes, there are times when I do reflect back towards them.

Bro: Let's talk a little bit about your education. What school did you go to?

Alb: Primary school? Fremont. Crocker Grammar and Spring Valley.

Bro: How old were you when you first started attending school in San Francisco? How long did you go?

Alb: I reckon I was about six years old.

Bro: How many years did you go?

Alb: About seven years.

Bro: What were some of your favorite courses during that time? The kinds of things you were most interested in?

Alb: I think it was history.

Bro: Did you have any ideas as a young man then as to what you wanted to do when you grew up?

Alb: No.

Bro: You didn't have a boyhood dream of being a doctor or a lawyer?

Alb: No.

Bro: Were there many other Negroes attending that school or the public schools at that time?

Alb: Yes. There were about two others in the school that I went to.

Bro: Do you recall their names, by any chance?

Alb: No, I don't think I can right off hand.

Bro: So you went to school with predominately white children?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: How early did you get out and have to work?

Alb: I was 15-16 years old.

Bro: And what type of work were you first engaged in?

Alb: Elevator operator.

Bro: Do you remember where that first job was?

Alb: Yes, it was down on First Street between Market and Mission.

Bro: Were there a lot of Negro elevator operators downtown at that time?

Alb: No, no others.

Bro: What type of work did you do after that?

Alb: I went to sea for a year. I had taken sick and the sea air and so forth I was advised would help my health, which it did.

Bro: What type of illness did you have?

Alb: Pneumonia.

Bro: What were some of the places you traveled when you went to sea?

Alb: British Columbia, Alaska, and Union Bay, Cumberland and back.

Bro: What kind of duties did you have as a seaman?

Alb: I was appointed the mess boy. I took care of the skipper's quarters.

Bro: Was the pay for that type of job pretty good at that time?

Alb: I think I was getting about \$25 a month.

Bro: Did that include your room and board?

Alb: Oh, yes.

Bro: Were there a lot of Negroes going to sea at that time?

Alb: There were quite a few. Yes, there was quite a few.

Bro: What types of jobs did they have on ships?

Alb: Just regular seafaring men, sailors and so on.

Bro: Can you tell me what kind of work you did after you stopped being a seaman?

Alb: I went back as an elevator operator and subsequently, from that, I became a valet for a blind man and millionaire. I think I showed you his picture, didn't I?

Bro: Yes, you did. How did you happen to get that particular job as a valet?

Alb: The brother of the old man Metzgar himself gave me the job. I was then working for them running the elevator on First Street. He owned that property, and he told his brother that he thought I would be just the right kind of a person for him to take care of him.

Bro: What was your reaction?

Alb: I said, oh yes, right away.

Bro: Was the pay that much better than what you were getting as an elevator operator?

Alb: Yes, yes. I got \$100.

Bro: \$100 a month?

Alb: Yes, that was big money then.

Bro: What exactly were your duties as a valet and financial secretary for this blind man?

Alb: Oh, I took him around, and helped dress him and so on. In addition to that I used to collect rent monies from different buildings that he owned.

Bro: Did he own a great deal of property in the city?

Alb: Yes, he had a great deal of property.

Bro: How long did you work for this particular man?

Alb: Well, about ten or eleven years.

Bro: Do you know what year you first started working for him?

Alb: About 1904.

Bro: So you worked for him until about 1914-1915?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: You lived during the Earthquake. That's something that a lot of us can't talk about today. Tell me a little about the Earthquake. What were you doing when that Earthquake hit?

Alb: Sleeping.

Bro: That was probably a good thing to be doing.

Alb: Yes. It was in the morning around five o'clock.

Bro: Where exactly were you at in the city at this time?

Alb: On Commercial and Kearny Street.

Bro: Was that a hotel?

Alb: Yes. My father was living there too. He had a room right upstairs directly over me. The Quake loosened, and one side of the building collapsed. Outside the building were big windows which years ago had iron shutters that pulled in and closed over a little balcony. When the bricks fell down, they forced the shutters closed. The doors in those days used to open out, and the door to my room was jammed shut -- I couldn't open it. So I made enough noise and yelled out for my father. He came down the best way he could and pulled away the rocks from the hallways to make the door wide enough so I could come out.

Bro: Were you hurt at all?

Alb: Nothing at all, but I lost everything I had.

Bro: All your possessions.

Alb: After I went out of there, I went down to check the old man. He lived on O'Farrell Street between Stockton and Powell. The whole front side of the hotel had fallen out into the streets, and left exposed the rooms on that end. He was right there. He slept through it all, which was a blessing. If he had awakened, he would have gotten killed, because he always got out of bed on the side that the whole damn building had fallen out of. I called his chauffeur, and we went up there together. We had the keys to his room, and we went in slowly. I went to the edge of his bed, went over to him, and spoke to him softly, "Now come out this way." I gave him my hand quickly so he wouldn't make any false move, then I told him what had happened. He couldn't believe he'd slept through all of it. I told him, "If you had gotten out of bed the other way, you would have landed at the foot of O'Farrell." I told the chauffeur, "You'd better take him out to his mother's." She was living out on Van Ness and Jackson Streets. And I said, "I'll be out there later. After you take him, come right back and we'll go up to

Alb: the office." He came back, and we went to the office. One of the rattles came afterwards. We bent the safe open and got about seventy-five, eighty thousand dollars, cash. We took it to the old man, who told us to hide it. In the meantime, the city had started on fire. The water mains had broken, and they had no water, and no hoses long enough to draw water in from the Bay. They had only about a mile of hose altogether. They were in a hell of a fix. The fire started, and nothing could stop it, and it just kept going. The Presidio authorities were brought in to play. They came down and brought in a lot of black powder and dynamite, and they went in about eight blocks and dynamited a whole row of buildings. They dynamited a whole ring around the city, the downtown part. I suppose that was the only thing that saved the city from burning down 100 percent. The west side of Van Ness Avenue was the stopping point of the fire. Van Ness Avenue was the widest street in San Francisco. It was approximately 100 feet wide. So you see, it was too wide a street for the flames to leap over and catch on the other side. Everything up to there was burned down.

Bro: You said you lost all your belongings. Where did you go after the Earthquake, where did you stay?

Alb: I stayed at a friend's house the night after. The fire hadn't got to it yet on Vallejo Street and Powell.

Bro: Was this another Negro?

Alb: Yes. Then from there I stopped at the house of a Jew on Pacific. Metzgar's house was all filled up, his brothers, and their families, his mother and so on. There was no space there at all.

Bro: Were people sympathetic about letting other people stay with them?

Alb: Yes. I don't think there were any people anywhere else in the world who

[continued on next page]

Alb: were as friendly as the old San Franciscans. There was absolutely no question whatsoever. People were dragging their trunks along the street, and someone would come along and help them. They'd take someone in their house they had never seen before in your life. People would be yelling out, "You want some place to stay, you want some place to stay?" Very, very fine.

Bro: It must have been a good feeling.

Alb: It really was. There was no sorrow, no sadness or crying or anything else, because everything was so cheerful. Everyone helping one another.

Bro: Did a lot of Negroes go to Oakland after the Earthquake?

Alb: Well, in the first place we never had many Negroes in San Francisco. I doubt if there were over 3,000 at the most in the whole city and I would say that 20 to 25 percent of them left there to come over to this side.

Bro: So most stayed in the city.

Alb: Yes.

Bro: How about whites, did many whites leave the city?

Alb: Yes, many went back East. The trains gave free transportation to people who wanted to leave. Of course they didn't guarantee nothing about bringing you back but those who were anxious to go, they could go. So there were many, many who left.

Bro: Were you in the first World War?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Alb: [Gets up to bring pictures of World War I segregated unit.]

Bro: Now, this is a picture you sent to Oscar Hudson.

Alb: Yes.

Bro: In 1918.

Alb: Yes.

Bro: Tell me a little bit about that.

Alb: About what?

Bro: About you and joining the service.

Alb: We organized the Volunteers.

Bro: When you say "we" you mean you and Mr. -

Alb: Hudson. And they wouldn't accept him as a candidate for officer, but they did me.

Bro: Why wouldn't they accept him?

Alb: I don't know. Some possible physical requirements. And this was at the training camp in Des Moines, Iowa, 1917. You see where my finger is right there.

Bro: Yes:

Alb: That's me.

Bro: Still a young man.

Alb: [Laughter.]

Bro: Now, this was a segregated camp.

Alb: Yes.

Bro: Were these colored troops from all over the country?

Alb: All over the country. Of course this was only one of the companies. There were ten companies.

Bro: Who organized this particular company?

Alb: The government.

Bro: But you and Mr. Hudson organized the Negro volunteers?

Alb: In the state here. But before the whole thing was through, the government organized what they called the 17th Division of training. [Regiments Association]. So we put our applications in for that and I was one of the successful ones they drafted. They said I was okay. We went to Des Moines, Iowa and that's where we trained. From there we opened up the first camp at Rockford, Illinois. That's where we organized the 92nd Division. I was in Company A.

Bro: What rank did you obtain?

Alb: First Lieutenant.

Bro: Did you actually do any fighting?

Alb: Yes, France.

Bro: How long were you over in France?

Alb: About nine months.

Bro: What was the reception when you got back to San Francisco?

Alb: Very good.

Bro: Was there an organization like a U.S.O. where colored troops could go at that time?

Alb: Yes. A Mrs. McCant Stewart was the head of the organization. And out of that, I found out, there were monies left over in the city's war chest for purposes of entertaining and looking out

Alb: for the Negro troops. I went to Mayor Rolph; he and I were very close friends. Mrs. McCant Stewart and I said, "We can use that money." I said, "We can organize a concern and call it the Booker T. Washington Institute."

Bro: Why would you call it the Booker T. Washington Institute? Who got the name for it?

Alb: Mrs. Stewart and myself. Of course at that time Booker T. Washington was foremost in the mind of all Negroes. We organized the Booker T. Washington Association; it is still in existence in San Francisco.

Bro: In San Francisco?

Alb: Oh, yes. They own their own property on Post and...

Bro: Presidio and Post?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: I'm quite familiar with it. How much money was available from that original fund?

Alb: Fifty thousand dollars.

Bro: How much money were you able to obtain from the fund for the Booker T. Washington Center?

Alb: We got the whole fifty thousand dollars.

Bro: Whose idea was it to start this community center?

Alb: Mrs. Stewart and myself.

Bro: Were there any other community centers where Negroes could go in San Francisco?

Alb: No, no.

Bro: What did black children do for recreation before the center?

Alb: Well, they just played around in the streets, that's all.

Bro: Would the White community centers admit them like the YMCA's or the Jewish Community centers?

Alb: At that time, no. No. We were trying very hard with Mr. McCoy, who was head of the YMCA at that time, but their feelings on everything were contrary to ours all the way through.

Bro: How was the Booker T. Washington Community Center received? Were Negroes enthusiastic about it?

Alb: Yes, yes. They received it well.

Bro: Tell me about some of the other leaders who were instrumental in establishing the center? What were some of the early aims? What were some of the purposes?

Alb: Well, I don't know if I remember that.

Bro: Let me put it this way. What were some of the early programs of the center?

Alb: It taught the kids different kinds of sports, boxing, wrestling, running, jumping, football.

Bro: How about public speaking, areas like that? Did it have programs in those areas?

Alb: No, not at first. Later, but at first, no.

Bro: How long were you associated with the center?

Alb: I would say I was with them the first ten years. Then after that I drew away from it because I was very much wrapped up in politics. You couldn't successfully run an organization like that if one end of it was political. So I just quietly moved away from it because I thought the organization just too much good to lose out. Too much effort had been put into it.

Bro: That brings up an interesting question. You are recognized as one of the leading Black politicians in San Francisco.

Alb: Maybe, yes, at that time.

Bro: How did you first get involved in politics?

Alb: I was very friendly with a man named Finn, Tom Finn. He was one of the state senators from San Francisco. Subsequently, he also ran for sheriff, and held the office of sheriff for a number of years. He was one hundred percent in favor of doing everything that he could on behalf of Negroes. He was an Irishman but a very, very fine fellow. He put himself out in many respects to aid and help us. I got into politics through him. Then I went statewide.

Bro: What was your political affiliation, Democrat or Republican?

Alb: Republican.

Bro: All your life?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: Why did you choose the Republican party rather than the Democratic?

Alb: Well, in the first place it was the party of Abraham Lincoln. That was the main reason.

Bro: Were most Negroes Republican in San Francisco?

Alb: At that time, yes. You couldn't find one Democrat.

Bro: And you worked with several other Negro politicians in San Francisco.

Alb: Yes.

Bro: Can you tell me a little bit about these men? I'm speaking particularly of Mr. McLamore and Mr. Peoples.

Alb: Mr. Peoples and I were very closely associated, and he edited one of the Negro publications in the city here. He had three children, two boys and one girl. And there was a Mr. John Taylor who owned a big bootblack stand. And Mr. McLamore who dabbled in the newspaper business too. And Mr. William Lashley who was associated with a big insurance concern downtown. I just can't recall all the names.

Bro: How did you hook up with these gentlemen and become a politician? You were associated with Mr. Finn. Did Mr. Finn introduce you to these men?

Alb: No. I knew them all myself. But Mr. Finn helped me out throughout the state in different counties. He was closely associated with the sheriffs in the various counties and so on. I took an active part in the election of Governor Richardson. I have a picture of him somewhere. And also Governor Frank Marriam and Governor James Rolph, Jr.

Bro: How about on the local level?

Alb: On the local level I was nonpartisan. The local offices were nonpartisan. So we supported sometimes some Democrats, so-called.

Bro: What was the role of Negro politicians at that time? What exactly did Negro politicians do?

Alb: First thing was to go forth to education and train the various politicians to [see] first what their knowledge was, what their hopes and expectations were -- that about told the whole thing.

Bro: Was it ever difficult getting out the Black vote to vote Republican?

Alb: Never. Never had any trouble.

Bro: When you look back upon those days, do you think that Blacks would have voted Republican even if there were no Negro politicians?

Alb: Oh yes, yes. At that time, the South what was, you really call the "South" with a capital "S." A Black person had absolutely no rights in any way, shape or form. You couldn't expect a Black man to be associated with things such as that. It wasn't until about the, I would say, first term of Franklin Roosevelt.

Alb: was there mixed voting of Blacks and Whites in the North and East. [Or, did Blacks vote Democratic.]

Bro: Why was there such a change with Mr. Roosevelt?

Alb: They had so much confidence in him, and they believed that he would do the many things that he advocated. Which he did, which he did. The result was, little by little, some of the Republican Negroes dropped over into the Democratic ranks. And the Blacks in the South began for the first time to become so-called enfranchised.

That's why half the Blacks in the South registered Democratic, don't you see.

Bro: What were some of the things Roosevelt improved upon?

Alb: I don't know if I can remember right now.

Bro: Just very briefly, what were the most significant things that stand out in your mind? Let me ask you another question, then. Were Blacks disillusioned with Republicans by the time Mr. Roosevelt came along?

Alb: Some were. Yes, some were.

Bro: Would you say most were?

Alb: No. I wouldn't say most were, but some were. Little by little it grew all right until right now I would judge it about 60 percent of us are Democrats.

Bro: How was that paper funded that Mr. Peoples had, the California Free Lance? Who funded that paper?

Alb: He did. He raised monies in his own way.

Bro: So that was not a Republican-funded paper?

Alb: No, no.

Bro: What were some of the rewards that Black politicians received from Republicans?

Alb: They got some small appointments here and there.

Bro: You, yourself, specifically, what did you receive for being a Negro politician?

Alb: Nothing.

Bro: Nothing at all? No money?

Alb: I wasn't looking for that. No.

End of tape 1, side 1.

Begin Tape 1, side 2.

Bro: A very reliable source told me that one of the rewards that Black politicians got was a bootblack stand in the Ferry Building.

Alb: Yes, I had that stand there for about four, five years.

Bro: Did you get that stand as a result of being a politician?

Alb: No doubt I did. Yes. Richardson was governor at the time, Friend W. Richardson.

Bro: Was that a very lucrative place for a Negro to have a bootblack stand?

Alb: Yes. It took in very, very good there.

Bro: What were the types of appointments that Negroes were given? Can you give me an idea of the types of appointments that were made?

Alb: Up in the legislature as pages and assistants; they divided those pretty equally between Whites and Blacks.

Bro: But nothing substantial?

Alb: No.

Bro: You worked on the statewide level with the Republicans as well. Can you tell me a little bit about that organization, how it got started, who funded it?

Alb: No, it just got started, in an off-hand way. Through Tom Finn, he was the one who raised a great deal of monies and he allocated a goodly portion of it toward me. I then organized in the various counties in the state where there were Negroes in fairly good proportion.

Bro: Did you receive much assistance from Negro politicians in this area?

Alb: Yes, yes. They cooperated very nicely. Very nicely indeed.

Bro: How large was this organization?

Alb: I would say we had between fifteen hundred to two thousand. Around two thousand.

Bro: This was throughout the entire state?

Alb: No, throughout the state we had maybe about fifteen thousand.

Bro: Is that right?

Alb: Yes, the greater portion were in Los Angeles.

Bro: Was the organization funded entirely by the Republicans?

Alb: Yes. Yes, of course. And by people we got assistance from, but primarily Republican money.

Bro: What primarily did this organization do?

Alb: It kept up the membership and got the members out to vote, which, after all, was the main purpose, to get results.

Bro: Were women active in this organization?

Alb: No, no, no. Women were not, no.

Bro: Was there any attempt by women to become members in this organization?

Alb: No, they didn't make any effort.

Bro: Were women active in politics in San Francisco?

Alb: Not at that time, no.

Bro: And why would that be? They just weren't interested?

Alb: Women as a whole weren't interested. When I say they weren't interested, I mean they could have been, but we didn't take the time to interest ourselves in interesting them.

Bro: Were Blacks from this organization able to get a representative on the National Republican Committee?

Alb: Oh yes, we had about three. I can't recall the names right now.

Bro: Does the name Walter Loving ring a bell?

Alb: Walter Loving was over here on this side. Walter Loving was once a colonel in the Philippine Army and he owned this property down here off of Seventh Street. Seventh, I think, and Peralta. A whole square block there.

Bro: So Blacks were able to gain representation on the national committee.

Alb: Yes.

Bro: Let's talk about jobs in general. What kind of work were most Negroes doing in San Francisco? I'm speaking of before the Second World War. Where would you find most Black men working and where would you find most Black women?

Alb: All the Black women were doing chores as maids and so forth in the various homes and so on. Very, very, very few were working in any of the establishments. The average other Negro was one who was working for the railroad, and there were a few longshoremen and a fair proportion of teamsters. In other occupations, there were just a few jobs here, a few jobs there. Nothing

Alb: in particular.

Bro: Did you know any of the railroad men and redcaps down at the Southern Pacific at Third and Townsend?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: Did you ever work down there yourself?

Alb: No.

Bro: What exactly did those workers do, what essentially was their job?

Alb: They helped carry baggage on and off trains.

They were attendants for passengers at the end of the line. Maybe about eight or nine at the most.

Bro: Were there a lot of Black bootblacks and newspapers corners in San Francisco?

Alb: A fair number.

Bro: And where were most Black businesses located?

Alb: Scattered all around. The greater portion was in the downtown area.

Bro: What types of businesses did Blacks have in San Francisco?

Alb: There were a couple of grocery stores and laundries, and a few shoe stands and barber shops. That's about it.

Bro: What Blacks were making money in the Black community?

Alb: Oh, I couldn't say.

Bro: Did you have an upper class in the Black in the same respect as you had an upper class in White society?

Alb: Yes, they had a few, just a few.

Bro: But there were no noticeably wealthy Black people in San Francisco?

Alb: The only one you had was Mammy Pleasant. She was the most outstanding one of any.

Bro: Did you ever have the occasion to meet her?

Alb: Yes, I met her on a few different occasions.

Bro: What do you remember about her?

Alb: Very, very highly intelligent woman. I didn't approve of a lot of the things she did.

Bro: Such as?

Alb: Furnishing these girls for these wealthy men and so on.

Bro: Was it well known throughout the city that she was --

Alb: Oh, yes. And the great majority of Negroes that had any kind of standing at all had absolutely no liking or respect for her in any way, shape or form.

Bro: Now, she never really lived in the Black community per se where the majority of most Blacks were living?

Alb: No. She had a mansion on Octavia Street between Sutter and Pine, or Sutter and Bush. It used to be Senator Bell's residence; it became her property at his death. That mansion must have had eighteen to twenty rooms.

Bro: Did you ever go in the mansion yourself?

Alb: Yes, I was in there years and years ago.

Bro: Was this during her lifetime?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: So she actually invited you?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: Were you considered friends with her or just associates?

Alb: No.

Bro: How would you describe the relationship?

Alb: Just acquaintances.

Bro: Did she have many Negro friends?

Alb: No, she didn't. She put thousands of dollars out for the benefit of Tuskegee University and Bethune-Spellman University, and about three or four different Negro universities, she must have put hundreds of thousands of dollars in to help them.

Bro: Was this well known among Negroes?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: And yet she still wasn't liked?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: How would you describe Mammy Pleasant? Was she a beautiful woman?

Alb: Yes, she was a very nice... There's no question about that. No question about that.

Bro: Did you ever have occasion to meet her husband?

Alb: She never had a husband as far as I know.

Bro: So from the time you were living in San Francisco you never knew --

Alb: No.

Bro: Did most Blacks in San Francisco ever think she had a husband?

Alb: No.

Bro: How about when she died? Was there a great deal of sorrow among Negroes?

Alb: I wasn't in the city when she died. I was away. Oh, she passed on maybe a couple of months before I really knew anything about it.

Bro: Was there a great deal of talk about her death?

Alb: Oh, yes. The papers had big write-ups about her.

Bro: Let me shift to housing. You lived downtown before the Earthquake. Where were most Negroes living in San Francisco around the turn of the century?

Alb: Westside, out in the west beyond Van Ness Avenue. Others lived south of Market, between Third and Seventh Street going south. A few lived out in the Mission.

Bro: Was it difficult for Negroes to rent housing during that time? Could Negroes live just about anywhere they wanted to?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: Did you ever have any trouble?

Alb: No, I never had any trouble. I lived on Post Street, I lived on Geary Street, I lived on Bush Street. And I lived on Hyde Street.

Bro: When did Negroes start moving into the Western Addition?

Alb: 1889-1899.

Bro: And you said that you never had any problems personally?

Alb: No.

Bro: Did you know of anyone who ever had any problems renting?

Alb: No, I didn't.

Bro: How about race relations in general? How would you describe them?

Alb: Very good.

Bro: No problems that you can remember?

Alb: No, none at all.

Bro: Comparing San Francisco to the South, you spoke about the South a little earlier, was there any comparison?

Alb: No way, shape, or form.

Bro: How about social life? What did most people do for recreation and social life?

Alb: Oh, I don't think I can answer that really.

Bro: Let's just go to the churches specifically. What church were you a member of?

Alb: I was a member of the St. Peter's Episcopal Church. That was a so-called White church. And we had the Bethel A.M.E. Church, Methodist Church, the Third Baptist Church, the Zion Church. Those were the three Negro churches in existence then.

Bro: Did you ever attend any of these Black churches?

Alb: Yes, the Bethel Episcopal Church. My mother's father was one of the so-called bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Cane was his name, Bishop Cane.

Bro: And did your parents attend the A.M.E. Church, the Bethel Church?

Alb: My parents and I were in the Episcopal Church.

Bro: Did you ever attend Third Baptist Church?

Alb: No. Oh, I visited there, yes. But not as a member.

Bro: How large was the membership of the Black churches that you mentioned?

Alb: They were fairly large. Five hundred or six hundred.

Abro: Were there a lot of social activities structured around the church, such as social outings, dances, that sort of thing?

Alb: There was a fair amount, yes.

Bro: What I'm getting at is, what did young adults like yourself do for recreation?

Alb: As I say I was never really a member of it, so I couldn't really tell you that.

Bro: Who were some of the important Black leaders in the community?

Alb: The names don't come to me right now. I really couldn't tell you right now.

Bro: Do you remember ministers as being fairly important?

Alb: Reverend Wilson, Reverend -- I can't pick the names up.

Reverend Haynes. I just can't think of them now.

Bro: How about Black newspaper editors?

Alb: Watkins was a newspaper editor. Also McLamore had a paper.

Bro: Do you remember the name of McLamore's paper?

Alb: No, I don't. I think it was the Free Lance.

Bro: I understand you had an association with John Pittman?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: Do you remember Mr. Pittman?

Alb: Yes, I forgot to mention his name as a newspaper man.

Bro: How did you come to meet John Pittman?

Alb: I meet him through his wife. His wife was formerly one of the Wysinger girls. He was well educated, very well educated boy. I think his home was originally in Georgia.

Bro: He edited the San Francisco Spokesman for several years. Were you associated with him during that time when he edited that newspaper?

Alb: Yes, I knew him.

Bro: What ever happened to John Pittman? He just disappeared.

Alb: I really do not know and no one has ever been able to tell me. I do not know. It's like overnight, like somebody just evaporated. Just like Marshall did over here, Marshall who originally had the Voice, the California Voice. Of course the woman he had been living with for twenty years over here --

Bro: Mr. Marshall?

Alb: Yes, Mr. Marshall. They were never married.

Bro: Is that right?

Alb: And he had a wife, an ex-wife, if that's what you want to call it, some place in Louisiana. And supposedly he went back there.

Bro: Did Pittman marry Gladys Wysinger?

Alb: Oh, yes. Yes.

Bro: Did she leave with him?

Alb: Oh no.

Bro: She stayed here?

Alb: Yes. The last I saw of her was about two years ago across the Bay.

Bro: What kind of a fellow was Mr. Pittman? How would you describe him? What was he like?

Alb: A very intelligent young fellow. High thoughts, high ideals.

Bro: Did he have a lot of friends in the community, the San Francisco community?

Alb: No, not so many because, peculiarly he never went around much. His wife was the one who was popular and her name is one of the old, old family. Because her father and a Mr. Fisher were the owners

Alb: originally of what they called the Western Outlook, a newspaper, for years.

Bro: And they were the editors?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: So Mr. Pittman sort of disappeared, left his wife here and no one has ever heard from him?

Alb: Right.

Bro: Did he create a lot of problems for Blacks in San Francisco?

Alb: No, not to my knowledge.

Bro: Was he well liked?

Alb: Of those who knew him, yes, they liked him.

Bro: How did established leadership react to him? Were they threatened by him?

Alb: No.

Bro: I understand that he had quite a rivalry with Mr. Daly of the Voice. He attacked the paper many times for example in his editorials as being too conservative.

Alb: Some of that could have been, yes.

Bro: I understand also that you had a long friendship with James Rolph, Jr.?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: How did you come to meet, come to be associated with Mr. Rolph?

Alb: I met him about 1904, 1903. He was down on California Street. He was associated with -- I forget the name of the firm he was associated with -- his brother, too. I didn't know his brother too well. At the time he broke in to run for mayor, I was one of the first to get behind him and I worked behind him 100 percent. He was elected, I think, four different terms and from there, right into the governor's business. He was a fellow who was full of vigor and full of life. He was a lady's man. He was always very lucky about that. His wife never exposed him, or anything else, whatsoever. There was a colored fellow, he used to run around with a lot. I think I mentioned his name to you, Dr. Leaner. Doc's father and he were chiropractists in the old Olympic Club in San Francisco for years. The thing about Leaner is, Rolph didn't know until something happened, that came up, and Leaner expressed himself, and that was the first time Rolph knew he was colored. (Laughter)

Alb: He looked just like a White man. They had been out drinking together and whoring together and what not. (Laughter)

Bro: And thinking he was a White man all this time!

Alb: Yeah. (Laughter)

Bro: Did that have any bearing on their friendship after that?

Alb: Well, I think it did, in a way, yes. I think it did, in a way, yes. Earl's dad, he was just the same complexion of his dad. The Olympic people never knew he was colored or they wouldn't have had him in there.

Bro: That was a lily-white organization, wasn't it?

Alb: Yes. (Laughter) So work or nothing else, he wouldn't have been in there.

Bro: What did most Negroes think of Rolph in San Francisco?

Alb: Oh, they all liked him. He was a good bull-shitter.

Bro: Was he the kind of person that colored people could come up and talk to?

Alb: Yes, on anything. Yes, he would find time for you. There were so many good things about him you couldn't help but like him.

Bro: What was your association with him primarily?

Alb: Oh, just friend to friend, that's all.

Bro: So he knew you when he saw you?

Alb: Oh, yes, yes. Yes, they gave a big reception for me when I returned from the War. He and his wife escorted me up to the platform and introduced me in the auditorium.

Bro: Do you remember when the reception was held?

Alb: I did have a picture once that they took, but somewhere in the shuffle it got lost. I think that was about 1919, around February. Yes I think it was around February 1919, after the War. We came back and they so-called honored me as being the only Negro from the city who was commissioned in office.

Bro: You said Rolph was pretty popular with Negroes.

Alb: Yes.

Bro: He made a remark in the 1930's, when he was Governor, after a San Jose man got lynched, do you remember that?

Alb: No, I don't.

Bro: Let me change course. You said you worked for him as governor. How did that come about? Did he ask you personally to work for him?

Alb: No, no, no. I volunteered.

Bro: Did you work through the same Republican organization?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: And essentially what did you do as a volunteer?

Alb: Encourage activity of Negroes in favor and support of Rolph for governor.

Bro: Let me shift to the Depression for a second. What sort of impact did the Depression, when it hit the Bay Area, have on Negroes in San Francisco?

Alb: I don't know if I really have any recollection of it. We didn't seem to suffer too much from it.

Bro: Were you ever on relief at that time?

Alb: No.

Bro: Did you know many Negroes who were on relief?

Alb: No, I don't.

Bro: Shifting again to the Second World War and the tremendous influx of Blacks coming into the area.

Alb: Yes.

Bro: What kind of impact did that have on San Francisco?

Alb: It didn't have any, but they came in almost by the thousands.

Bro: How would you describe it? What was San Francisco like during that period of time?

Alb: In what way?

Bro: How did the city react?

Alb: All right.

Bro: There was no adverse reaction?

Alb: No. No adverse reaction.

Bro: Where did these Negroes live when they came in?

Alb: Out in the Western Addition and off the south of Market.

Bro: Was housing a problem?

Alb: Yes. No, no problem.

Bro: When I said "Was housing tight during that period of time," was it easy to find?

Alb: Yes, it was easy to find.

Bro: What sort of changes did all these Negroes have upon the community? When I say changes I mean the impact, in what ways did the community change as a result of these Negroes?

Alb: The community was able to absorb them without any difficulties at all.

Bro: Were there any problems with rivalries for leadership?

Alb: No.

Bro: Do you remember what the majority of these Negroes were voting then; were they Democrats or Republicans?

Alb: No, Republicans.

Bro: Do you recall how most of these Negroes came in? Did they come on trains, did they drive their own cars here?

Alb: Most came by train.

Bro: Do you know -- I almost don't want to give it away but I'll say it. I heard that there were actually labor recruiters going to the South to get these Negroes. Do you know anything about that?

Alb: Well, we heard that. But it was never able to be proven.

Bro: Did you actually talk to some Negroes that told you that?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: And how did they describe that?

Alb: Just that there were people who were able to influence, and to do what they could to influence, the cause of a lot of those Negroes from down below there to come to San Francisco, where they would have a job waiting for them.

Bro: Do you know if they actually had to pay these men?

Alb: No.

Bro: What sort of gains were made as a result of the War? Let's take the employment. Were there any major breakthroughs in employment?

Alb: Yes, there was. I would say in practically all industries. Anything that a Black man was capable of handling, he could get the job. He maybe couldn't get into the union, but he could get the job. It was a few years, a few hard years, before the unions begin to accept the Black man.

Bro: Was this true of all unions?

Alb: Yes. I think San Francisco was about the strongest union labor city in the whole country.

Bro: Why wouldn't they admit Blacks to unions?

Alb: Just because they didn't want to. That's all.

Bro: And you said this did change as a result of the War?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: How about the types of jobs Blacks were working in?

Alb: They got all different kind of jobs they were able to go in. Little by little, they got into everything.

Bro: How about Black women? Were there any significant changes in the types of --

Alb: No, there wasn't too much of a change in that. Black women for years weren't able to tackle any professional work.

Bro: So the opportunity was strictly limited to black men?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: Were you a member of any organization like the Elks, the Masons?

Alb: Yes, the Odd Fellows, Grand United Order of Odd Fellows, and office of the Masonic Lodge. That was the only two.

Bro: Were you ever associated with the NAACP?

Alb: Yes. I'm one of the organizers of it.

Bro: The Northern California Branch?

Alb: In the country, not only in Northern California.

Bro: Can you tell me how you got started in that?

Alb: Fellow who headed it was named Butler. Butler and Peoples, McLamore, John Taylor, Marshall --

Bro: Now you're speaking of San Francisco, is that right?

Alb: Yes, and some over here, Marshall, Wysinger, Francis, that's all I can think of off hand. We were all the ones that organized it along with Mr. DuBois.

Bro: Do you remember what year that was?

Alb: Around about 1919.

Bro: Was there an NAACP over in the East Bay already?

Alb: No. Yes, we first organized here and called it the Northern California NAACP. It supposedly was to look after and take care of the northern portion of the state.

Bro: Why did you organize one in San Francisco as well?

Alb: Because there seemed to be more activity in the city that could be taken to aid and help us, in the way we wanted throughout the country by getting more publicity and so on.

Bro: Who was the first president of that NAACP?

Alb: Butler.

Bro: Was this John Howard Butler?

Alb: His uncle.

Bro: Or was it Walter Butler?

Alb: Walter Butler.

Bro: Do you remember some of those major issues during those early years?

Alb: No, I can't.

Bro: Was there a lot of support by Negroes in San Francisco?

Alb: Oh, yes.

Bro: Was that a large organization?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: Do you remember how many members were involved?

Alb: All together approximately 1,500 - 2,000.

End Tape 1, Side 2.

Begin Tape 2, Side 1.

Bro: What was your grandfather's name again?

Alb: Cain [Kane?]

Bro: Do you recall his first name?

Alb: Off hand I can't think of it, no.

Bro: Did he live in San Francisco?

Alb: No, he lived in Baltimore.

Bro: And what was his occupation?

Alb: He was a minister.

Bro: Do you remember what type of minister?

Alb: A Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Bro: You said you don't remember meeting him. Did you go back there to meet him or did he come out here?

Alb: No, no.

Bro: But you don't recall what he looked like?

Alb: I don't have the slightest idea.

Bro: But you do remember the name Edward Kane?

Alb: Yes, yes.

Bro: How about your grandmother?

Alb: No, I never met her either.

Bro: Where was she from?

Alb: Baltimore, Maryland.

Bro: Did she ever come to San Francisco?

Alb: No.

Bro: Not at all to your knowledge?

Alb: No.

Bro: Do you recall at all what her name was? Prior to being married?

Alb: No, I don't think I can tell you that either.

Bro: And did she ever come to San Francisco?

Alb: To my knowledge, no.

Bro: How about your father -- you told me he was from Jamaica.

Alb: My grandmother must have been here in San Francisco for some little time because my mother was born here. you see.

Bro: But you don't remember your grandmother per se?

Alb: No. I was just an infant when she passed away.

Bro: Did your mother ever talk to you about your grandmother?

Alb: No, she never did.

Bro: You told me once before your father was from Jamaica. How old was he when he came to San Francisco?

Alb: He was about in his middle twenties.

Bro: You told me he was a seafaring man.

Alb: Yes.

Bro: What did he do later on in life for an occupation?

Alb: He just was sort of a valet for the owner of the Occidental Hotel.

Bro: Was this a San Francisco hotel?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: Your mother, did she work?

Alb: No.

Bro: Never in her life? ♪

Alb: No.

Bro: What was your mother's name before she was married?

Alb: Anne Elizabeth Kane.

Bro: And was she a San Franciscan?

Alb: Yes, she was born in San Francisco.

Bro: She lived here all of her life?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: Did your parents ever tell you stories about their lives?

Alb: No. Never went into it.

Bro: You told me they didn't tell you stories about their parents at all.

Alb: No, never. Not off hand. I think one brother went to New York. Brooklyn, I think.

Bro: Was this a brother of your father?

Alb: Yes. I had a picture of him.

Bro: So this was a picture of your grandfather that you were looking for?

Alb: Yes. And he had a brother in Brooklyn, and there was some publication that had an article in it about him. I don't know now. I have it some place.

Bro: It will turn up after I leave like it always does. That's the way things work. Where was the first home you lived at in San Francisco with your parents?

Alb: On Pacific and Mason.

Bro: Were your parents renting at that time?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: What was that home like?

Alb: Well, I don't know how to describe it. It was peaceful, happy. At that time there were three boys and one girl.

Bro: Were these your brothers and sisters?

Alb: Yes. And subsequently one more, Herbert, the youngest boy -- he died. He has a son that's living now in Los Angeles.

Bro: So you have four brothers and one sister, is that correct?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: Did any of them live in San Francisco?

Alb: All of them.

Bro: What are their names, as well as the name of your sister?

Alb: There was Ben, Fred, Herbert, the youngest, myself and my sister. Her name was Octavia. I had a picture of her too some place but I don't know where it is.

Bro: Was it a large apartment that you lived in at that time?

Alb: No. It was a rather small place, about five rooms.

Bro: How were you raised as a young man? Were your parents very stern?

Alb: No, no. They were not.

Bro: When you and your brothers and sister misbehaved as all young people do, which parent --

Alb: No. I think we got along pretty good. I had very little squabbles and so forth.

Bro: Which parent were you the closest to, your mother or your father?

Alb: My father.

Bro: Did you and your father talk a great deal?

Alb: Yes, he lived with me up until the time he died. I have a large picture of him. Did I show it to you?

Bro: Yes, I think you did. How about when you had to be disciplined? Did your father do the disciplining or your mother?

Alb: My mother.

Bro: Were you close to your brothers and sisters?

Alb: Yes, we were all very close.

Bro: You mentioned last time we talked also that you helped organize the NAACP in San Francisco. Can you go into a little more detail about that? How did that get started and how did you go about getting involved in that in the first place?

Alb: Walter Butler, who lived on this side of the Bay, he and Jackson, I just can't think of his first name, the names get kind of hazy to me -- and Mrs. McCant Stewart.

Bro: So they came to you with the idea, is that right?

Alb: Yes, well we got together and we read and heard about the effort that was being put forth in organizing -- this was in the East, and we got in touch with those parties, and from that we organized the Northern California NAACP. That supposedly took in all of Fresno north? And we'd meet once a month.

Bro: Did you meet over in Oakland or in San Francisco?

Alb: Both sides of the Bay. One time over here and another time over across the Bay.

Bro: Now that was the Northern California NAACP. Did you get involved in organizing the San Francisco NAACP a little bit later?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: How did that get organized?

Alb: From that agreement was worked out that the San Francisco members would automatically become members of the San Francisco NAACP; the others the Oakland NAACP.

Bro: Were you ever an officer at that time of the NAACP, the San Francisco Branch of the NAACP?

Alb: No, I never held an office.

Bro: Do you remember John Howard Butler who was working with the NAACP?

Alb: Yes, John Howard Butler worked along with us.

Bro: You also mentioned that you were a Mason and an Oddfellow. When did you first of all get involved with the Masons and the Oddfellows?

Alb: About 1919.

Bro: Was that in San Francisco?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: Do you remember the name of the organization?

Alb: The Golden Gate Lodge, the Oddfellows. The Golden Gate Lodge Number 2007. The Masonic Lodge we organized in Berkeley. It was called the Westgate Masonic Lodge. And Attorney Hudson, Oscar Hudson, he was the real head and leader of it. He and a man named T.W. Sweeney.

Bro: Let's go back to the Golden Gate Lodge in San Francisco. You said that was organized in 1919. Was that an all Negro organization?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: Were lodges important for Negroes in San Francisco?

Alb: They weren't so important, but again they had a certain amount of status.

Bro: What were some of the things that lodges were doing in those days, particularly the Golden Gate Lodge?

Alb: Well, I couldn't tell you just particularly.

Bro: Let me phrase it another way, why were lodges important? Why did people join lodges?

Alb: It sort of identified you in a way that described you as being a little over the average person, and that a certain amount of dignity it gave to you. You began to express yourself in a manner that would be dignified and understanding to the community in general. And also looking out for the health and welfare of yourselves.

Bro: Were most important Negroes members of lodges in San Francisco?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: Was it difficult to join a Negro lodge?

Alb: No, it wasn't difficult, but one of the main things, one had to be of good character. That was the main thing.

Bro: What did that mean, to be of good character then?

Alb: Well, just what the name implied. Respectful, outstanding, and a person who possessed abilities to carry on and do certain kind of functions in the community.

Bro: Was it expensive to join a lodge?

Alb: No, no. Inexpensive. You paid a certain amount of dues a month and a certain amount of dues for admission.

Bro: Did the Golden Gate Lodge have burial provisions for its members?

Alb: Yes, for its members.

Bro: Do you remember how much they allotted?

Alb: I think it was about \$250.

Bro: Did they provide sick benefits also?

Alb: Yes, that was a small amount, yes.

Bro: Do you remember what your dues were when you were a member of this lodge?

Alb: Dues were, I think, two dollars a month.

Bro: And the initiation fee you had to pay to get in the first time?

Alb: Yes, I think it was about ten dollars.

Bro: How many members, roughly, were members of the Golden Gate Lodge?

Alb: Between 150 and 200.

Bro: Do you remember where you met in San Francisco?

Alb: What did you say?

Bro: Do you remember where the meetings were held in San Francisco?

Alb: I'm trying to think of the name of that hall. There was a hall that leased out sections to various lodges and we had one section.

Bro: Do you remember just the streets it was located on?

Alb: For a while we were on Bush Street near Powell and I just can't remember right now the locations.

Bro: Let me switch to another area. You told me last time you worked for Mr. Metzgar for a number of years.

Alb: Yes.

Bro: What jobs did you do after you stopped working for him?

Alb: I worked for myself.

Bro: And what kind of work was that?

Alb: I had a bootblack stand down at the Ferry Building. It was an eight-chair stand and then I went for a year seafaring on the steamship Glory of the Seas, as a messboy, messman, and I looked out for the quarters of the captain.

Bro: How did you get that job as a bootblack at the Ferry Building?

Alb: That was a concession from the state. And that time Friend W. Richardson was governor of the state.

Bro: And was this a position he gave you for working in his campaign?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: Did you do well financially at that stand.

Alb: Yes. Very good, very good.

Bro: How many years did you have that job at that stand?

Alb: About six years.

Bro: What kind of work did you do in the late thirties? I understand that you got into real estate later on.

Alb: Yes. Real estate and insurance. I done good in that too.

Bro: Was this your own business?

Alb: Yes. I was in a building downtown called the Russ Building. That's on the ground now where the Crocker Bank building is -- Montgomery, Sutter and Post Street.

Bro: How did you get the training for real estate?

Alb: Just picked it up, that's all.

Bro: You never owned any property in San Francisco, is that right?

Alb: No, never did.

Bro: Why didn't you ever buy a home in San Francisco?

Alb: In the first place, conditions and so forth was too high for me to meet. That was the first thing. The second thing, I had no particular reason to do so at that time, being a single man.

Bro: Just getting back to the real estate for a minute. Did you have a partner in that real estate business?

Alb: No.

Bro: You worked it by yourself?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: And did you cater to Negroes and Whites or just Negroes?

Alb: No, both.

Bro: You knew Oscar Hudson fairly well, is that correct?

Alb: Very well.

Bro: How did you come to meet Oscar Hudson?

Alb: Oh, just in a casual way. Right after he moved to Oakland here, he came from somewhere in the East, I think from Nebraska, and we got to be good friends. I aided him by introducing many of his clients to him. Then after a couple of years here, he told me about a brother that he had back east who was in the undertaking business and would like to get out this way. I encouraged him, and eventually his brother came out here, Luther, and he opened an undertaking parlor on Eighth Street.

Bro: In Oakland?

Alb: In Oakland. Hudson Funeral Parlor, and subsequently, this young

Alb: fellow who worked with him, Hermes, he sold it to him, and Hermes runs it now on Telegraph Avenue. It is a beautiful place.

Bro: What kind of fellow was Oscar Hudson like?

Alb: Very nice, quiet fellow, very brilliant and he was always aiding and helping people. He was a very, very successful attorney. He spoke Spanish very fluently and he had a clientele of Spanish people that ran into the hundreds. He eventually bought a home over here on Hearst Avenue and Magee.

Bro: So you're saying he did well financially?

Alb: Very, very well.

Bro: Were most of his clients San Francisco people?

Alb: No, no, no. People from around the Bay Area.

Bro: Did he have an office in San Francisco?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: Do you remember where he worked?

Alb: He had an office in the Monadnock Building on Market Street, Market and Third. He had one on Bush and Kearney Street and then on Merchant Street between Montgomery and Kearney.

End Tape 2, side 1.

Begin Tape 2, side 2.

Bro: Do you remember who he worked with, Oscar Hudson? Did he have associates working with him, other Negroes?

Alb: Well he had one at one time. I never met him, because it was during the time that I was in the War, named McCant Stewart, who subsequently committed suicide. I knew his widow, but I never met him.

Bro: Did Mr. Hudson ever tell you why Mr. Stewart committed suicide?

Alb: No.

Bro: Did he ever talk about Mr. Stewart at all?

Alb: No.

Bro: Do you know how he and Mr. Stewart got together and became partners?

Alb: No.

Bro: Did he work alone after that?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: Was he in any other business ventures, Mr. Hudson?

Alb: No, but he put some money, an investment, in the Garvey movement.

Alb: A Negro named Garvey, Marcus Garvey, who organized, I forget the name of the steamship company he called it.

Bro: And what happened as a result of that?

Alb: I don't know. Eventually it was a mixup that came in and the government got involved and soon, and they banned Garvey, and Garvey left this country. He had a so-called back to Africa movement, they called it.

Bro: Do you know how much money Mr. Hudson lost as a result of that?

Alb: Oh, I don't know, I have no idea.

Bro: Were you ever in the Garvey movement yourself?

Alb: Yes, I was in the movement.

Bro: Was that over in San Francisco?

Alb: Yes, yes. Headquarters there.

Bro: Was that popular then?

Alb: Yes, at that time it was very popular. Quite a few businesses were organized, so-called in the name of the Garvey movement. And Garvey came out here for about a week, across the Bay, and they had quite big turnouts. And so on. I think he collected around over a hundred and some odd thousand dollars.

Bro: Is that right?

Alb: Toward his cause, yes.

Bro: Do you remember what year he came out here?

Alb: No, I don't.

Bro: What took place at those Garvey meetings?

Alb: Well, there was discussion about various lines of business that they anticipated going into. And they made an effort to find out if the public was in accord with them, and where they expressed themselves as favorable. And the next move was to organize and raise monies with the aim and object of eventually going into that particular line of business.

Bro: What type of businesses were considered viable for that time?

Alb: Well, they were in the steamboat business and the furniture business and the grocery business and I forget a few other things along that line.

Bro: Were Whites in the movement at all?

Alb: No.

Bro: Were they supporting the Garvey movement in San Francisco at all?

Alb: No.

Bro: So most of the funding came from Negroes.

Alb: Yes.

Bro: Do you remember some of the other Negroes in the Garvey movement in San Francisco?

Alb: No, I just can't think off hand.

Bro: Did those Negroes want to go back to Africa? Was that part of the scheme too?

Alb: Oh yes. I would say at least 50 to 60 percent of the people were inclined to so do. And in fact, I say there was at least 5 percent of the people who did own property and other things like that, sold things and did go back.

Bro: In San Francisco?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: Do you know anybody by name specifically?

Alb: No, I just can't. Not off hand.

Bro: If the organization had had the money to send all of its members back to Africa, would you have gone yourself?

Alb: I don't know -- I don't know.

Bro: We talked a little bit about women and politics last time and you told me, quite honestly, women weren't an important part of politics. Do you remember a woman by the name of Ada Wilson?

Alb: Yes, the name is familiar.

Bro: Do you remember much about her?

Alb: No.

Bro: How about Irene Bell Ruggles?

Alb: Oh yes. Irene Bell Ruggles was a very active woman.

Bro: Was she involved in Republican party politics?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: How important a figure was she in San Francisco?

Alb: She had her friends and she had a very good standing.

Bro: Was she considered a leader among San Franciscans?

Alb: No, but she was --

Bro: Did you know her husband, David Ruggles?

Alb: Yes, very well.

Bro: Is that right?

Alb: His father and his mother all were old, old timers, and came to San Francisco about the time that my grandparents did. Yes, they

Alb: were all very close friends.

Bro: What was Irene's husband, David Ruggles, like? What sort of person was he?

Alb: I couldn't tell you now. As long as I knew Dave I really couldn't tell you.

Bro: Was he an educated man?

Alb: Yes, yes.

Bro: Do you know what he did for a living -- what kind of work he was involved in?

Alb: No. I couldn't tell you.

Bro: Do you know where he lived at in San Francisco?

Alb: He lived on Pacific near Leavenworth Street.

Bro: Did he and Irene own their own home or were they renting?

Alb: No, renting.

Bro: Were Negro women any different then than they are today? What differences if any do you see?

Alb: In what respect?

Bro: Just in terms of their attitude, their aggressiveness. Do you see many differences in terms of women, period then than you do today?

Alb: Well, that's kind of hard to define. There were many who were very active and trying to look further ahead. I don't know. I think they had pretty nearly a grade or so higher thoughts than maybe so the kids of today have.

Bro: More ambition?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: As a young man living in San Francisco, did you ever go down on the Barbary Coast for entertainment?

Alb: Yes. I had an uncle who ran a place down there.

Bro: What place?

Alb: I think I told you about the way they use to Shanghai--

Bro: No, you didn't tell me that.

Alb: Yes, he had a place on Pacific Street just below Montgomery Street.

At that time, the water from the Bay ran up as far as Battery Street, and there was piling and a wooden dump was run on down pretty nearly now the Bay and Embarcadero. And you had about maybe eight feet between the street level and the depths under-

Alb: neath you. And they had row boats they would row up to whatever designated place they were going to. And the seafaring ships where the captain needed one, two, three, or four more to make up a crew, whatever it is, he had his means and ways of getting this information. So this particular evening, the day before the ship was due to leave, persons who came in there to have a drink or so on, whatever they came in for. And there was only one or two persons in there, and they'd bolt the door and give them a drink with knockout drops in. And they'd pull a chain and release the floor that they're standing on. The floor would be a swinging floor. And down they'd fall. But they'd fall on a lot of straw so they wouldn't hurt. And then the rowboat would be given orders to take them out, so they would row them out in the Bay, out to the ship in the Bay. And as the captain paid off at the time right there, then they hauled up the body to them. And sometimes, the person was knocked out to the extent where he didn't recover until he was out at sea. But no matter what it was, he was a prisoner aboard there. And that went on for years until one day they, someone, I don't know who, kidnapped the son of a very wealthy family. And they kept the young fellow up there in the north, transferring him from one ship to the other for about two years, and eventually the boy got the confidence of the people aboard ship and when he got a chance to go ashore with the other sailors and so he, he telephoned his people back East and the father sent out for him right away. Gave him money, told him to take care of himself, and so on like that. And from that started a movement whereby that Shanghaiing was put out of business entirely.

Bro: What was the name of the place that your uncle ran?

Alb: The Need More.

Bro: And what was this uncle's name?

Alb: Joe Astone Caston.

Bro: What were some of the places that you personally went to on the Barbary Coast for entertainment?

Alb: The So Different, and Lew Purcell's and Lester Mapp.

Bro: What were those places like?

Alb: You had a bar in front and then in the rear, back there you had dancing space. They had these sporting girls, and you could pick out anyone to dance with and so forth like that. If

- Alb: you wanted to make a date with her, you could go upstairs, they had rooms upstairs. They flourished for maybe fifteen or twenty years there. And with all the raids, anybody who ever came to San Francisco, the first thought was always to be able to visit the Barbary Coast. That's how famous it was.
- Bro: Sounds like a lot of fun. Were they popular among Negroes in San Francisco?
- Alb: Oh, yes.
- Bro: Did all classes of Negroes go to those places?
- Alb: Yes, and you found all classes of Whites, the same too.
- Bro: So they were inter-racial.
- Alb: Yes. Of course there were eight or nine times as many White places as there were negro on the Barbary Coast.
- Bro: Do you remember George Walker and Bert Williams in San Francisco?
- Alb: Yes. I remember when they came there to play.
- Bro: Do you remember when they first got started as young men?
- Alb: That was about in the twenties -- around about 1926 or 1924. Bert Williams and then there was Ernest Hogan. He was a distant relative of mine, by the way. Ernest Hogan, Hogans Minstrels. They had Black Patti's Troubadours. I forget the others.
- Bro: Did you take part in those theatrical performances?
- Alb: I went to see them all, yes.
- Bro: Were Negroes a prominent part of those theaters at that time?
- Alb: Yes, those were exclusively Negro.
- Bro: How about the minstrel shows? Were they popular with Negroes?
- Alb: Yes, very much so.
- Bro: Do you have any children Mr. Alberga?
- Alb: No, no.
- Bro: I wasn't quite sure if I had asked you that last time.
- Alb: No, none at all.
- Bro: I found that Black San Franciscans did not have children. Why was that? You never had time for children or you didn't like kids. or you just never thought about it?
- Alb: [Just shakes his head, as if to reply "I don't know."]
- Bro: Let me get your father's full name again, Sir.
- Alb: Benjamin Jo [?] Alberga.

Bro: And your mother's full name?

Alb: Anne Elizabeth Alberga.

Bro: What was her maiden name?

Alb: Anne Elizabeth Cain.

Bro: And do you know her father's or mother's maiden name?

Alb: No.

Bro: I think we talked briefly about Walter Sanford. I just want to make sure I covered all the grounds on him.

Alb: For eight years Walter Sanford was the... What do they call it now -- usher, he was called.

Bro: What exactly did he do?

Alb: Usher in the people who came to see the mayor and also act as a messenger for the mayor between the supervisors and the mayor's office.

Bro: Was that considered an important job for a Negro?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: Was that the highest job a Negro had in city hall in San Francisco? To your knowledge?

Alb: Yes. You could call it that.

Bro: Was Walter Sanford an important person in the Black community?

Alb: No, not necessarily so, not.

Bro: How did he come to get that particular job?

Alb: Oh, it was just accidental, accidental.

Bro: When you say accidental, what do you mean?

Alb: Well, some friend submitted his name to the mayor when the former holder of that office had died and passed away. A man name Anderson.

Bro: Was Anderson a Negro also?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: So Anderson preceded Sanford as an usher?

Alb: Yes.

Bro: I just have one last question. When you look back over your life again, what have been the ingredients for your particular success? Why have you been such a successful man?

Alb: I don't know -- it's kind of hard to say.

Bro: Well, what do you think have been the ingredients for your success?

Alb: I don't know. I don't know how to put it.

Bro: Have you just been lucky?

Alb: You may call it that. You may call it luck.

Bro: Have you been an extremely hard worker?

Alb: You may call it luck.

Bro: You're being modest now. Have you ever thought about it, why you've had a successful life?

Alb: No, I've never given it a thought.

End of Interview.

